

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM

31st January 2021: Candlemas

Hazel writes:

It seems that we will be continuing to provide on-line and paper-based resources for some time to come. We are aware of the difficulties which some people find this creates with their worship. While we will open the church buildings for private prayer and communion services as soon as we consider it safe to do so, there are things that we can do to make our on-line worship feel more like attending a church building. Firstly, make a point of joining the service at the time when others are doing so. Our 10am offering will always be watched 'live' at that time, whether this is on YouTube (pre-recorded or livestreamed), or on Zoom. And make sure you have all that you need with you – the readings sheet and the liturgy sheet if you need this for the words to join in with – so that you will not be distracted. You can bring a cup of coffee with you, but please make sure that you will not need to go to the toilet during the service. Light a candle if that helps to keep you focussed (and changing out of your pyjamas before the service starts will also help).

Next Sunday, 7th February there will be a **service of Holy Communion** on our YouTube Channel at 10am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – Today's service is being held on Zoom, so the video of the service will only be posted to the websites later in the day (hopefully by 1pm at the latest). All other files have been combined and posted as a pew sheet which has been sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line.

Other worship and resources that you might want to listen to or look at on Sunday:

- The Church of England's national virtual service will be available on their website at www.churchofengland.org.
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
 - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 from Belfast – a City shaped by the sea with the Very Rev. Stephen Forde.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Paul's Cathedral, London.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. Mark de-Lisser hosts the Semi-final of the Gospel Singer of the year for 2021.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need UHT Milk (Urgent) Fruit Juice (Urgent), cold meat, vegetables (particularly carrots), desserts, shaving gel/razors. There are large stocks of Pasta, rice, beans, soup, cereals, tea and toilet rolls and these items are politely discouraged at the present time. Thank you for your continuing support.

Each week our **"coffee/tea & chat"** on Thursday at 2.30 pm is an opportunity to share with others. It is just 40 minutes and you don't need to commit to joining each week. Please let Rowena (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

The Rotary Club is offering FREE **Work Club workshops** to help with a job search on-line via Zoom. They all run from 10-11am on the following dates:

- Thur 4th Feb – Job search
- Fri 12th Feb – Interview skills
- Weds 17th Feb – Ace your LinkedIn profile
- Thur 25th Feb – Start your own business

To book your place, email rotaryworkclub@gmail.com.

Ivy Sheen's funeral will take place at St. Marys at 11.00 a.m. on Friday 19th February. There are a **very limited** number of spaces and if there is anyone who would like to attend, please get in touch with Beryl (0208 289 8097) and we will let you know if this is possible. The service will be live streamed for those unable to attend.

We have a plan to **open the church buildings for private prayer** on Ash Wednesday. This will only be for a brief period of time but will enable those who find the place important to them, to mark Ash Wednesday. We would also like to open St Francis' church every subsequent Wednesday morning for an hour. Please do not feel under any obligation to take part in this, but if you would like to be involved in opening up the building, please contact Joan Burford (jandbburford@talktalk.net or 020 8777 2034) who will put together a rota for the weeks ahead.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday – 17th February. On that day, both churches will be open for private prayer and there will also be an on-line service (we are currently considering the best format for this). On the previous Sunday (14th February) there will be an on-line service to help in your Lenten preparation, where I will demonstrate

preparing ash for the service on Wednesday and I will talk about what resources you might want to think about using during Lent.

One of the opportunities that will be available during Lent will be meeting with others in Home Groups. Currently we cannot do this face to face, but three groups are meeting on-line on Zoom and have agreed to open up their meetings each week to others. They will all be following the same material from a book 'The Nail' by Stephen Cottrell. This follows Christ's crucifixion from the point of view of different people and we will be exploring this in our sermons, so that each week the groups pick up on the character who was the subject of the sermon on the previous Sunday. This will also enable us to possibly look at clips from the video of 'The Passion' which we didn't watch all the way through last year.

If you would like to join one of the groups, please would you contact the relevant leader who will let you know the relevant link for accessing the meetings:

- Richard Ford (richard.ford73@gmail.com or 020 8289 2432) if you'd like to meet on a Monday evening at 8pm;
- Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 07771 782914) if you'd like to meet on a Wednesday evening at 8pm;
- Ken Bryan (kennethabryan@aol.com or 07939 535996) if you'd like to meet on a Friday morning at 10.30am.

You can join different meetings each week if we know about this in advance.

Hazel

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl bbolton@ntlworld.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

Collect

Lord Jesus Christ,
light of the nations and
glory of Israel:
make your home among us
and present us pure and
holy to your heavenly
Father, your God, and our
God.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2: 22-40

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the

Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,
²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great

age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord, you fulfilled the hope of Simeon and Anna, who lived to welcome the Messiah: may we, who have received these gifts beyond words, prepare to meet Christ Jesus when he comes to bring us to eternal life; for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

TALK:

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of Christ's Presentation in the Temple, we come to the end of our Christmas celebrations, as we saw as Hazel undertook the dismantling of the crib.

And there is I think a noticeable change in the content of our Gospel reading today. Just cast your mind back over what we have heard in our Gospels from Christmas onwards. Christmas is, of course, when we focus on the Incarnation – God taking on human flesh, identifying himself in Jesus with us his creatures.

But for most of this time we have been focusing on what you might call the supernatural aspect of the incarnation, or perhaps you might prefer to call it the divine side.

On Christmas Day we heard Luke's account of the angels announcing to the shepherds the Good News of the Messiah's birth.

At Epiphany we heard of the arrival of the Magi at the home of the humble carpenter and his young wife to pay homage to their baby – not what we might call a common event in the lives of ordinary people. And how many mothers have heard their child hailed as the future King of the Jews?

Then we celebrated the baptism of Christ, but whilst there were many coming to baptism at the same time, only at Jesus' baptism did the heaven's open, the Holy Spirit descend in bodily form and the voice of God speak.

And just last week, we had the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

But today we hear a different note in the Gospel, for today the Gospel focuses on Jesus as an ordinary baby, an ordinary child, whose parents are taking him through the rituals that every Jewish baby boy and his parents would go through: purification and the ceremony of the first born male.

Certainly it is true that during these rituals, the prophets Simeon and Anna appear, with Simeon commenting on Jesus' future role, but my mother tells me that soon after my older brother was born an elderly gentleman looked at him in his pram and told her that she was to be careful how she brought him up, because he was going to have a significant impact on the world. Now obviously his achievements weren't on the same scale as those of Jesus, but in his own field of employment and adult education he made a difference to many people's lives.

In both cases, what we might call an ordinary event, the birth of a child, was made extraordinary by those who recognised its particular significance and spoke of it.

Now the elderly gentleman's comment wasn't in the same class as the prophecies made by Simeon, but I still think that a key element in today's reading is the ordinary, everyday nature of what is going on. This, in contrast with the divine elements of our Christmas and Epiphany celebrations, is Jesus being shown as being fully human, as being one of us, of experiencing what we experience.

This was something that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews picked up on in one of the other readings set for today. As he puts it: Jesus "had to be made like his brothers in every way." So because we are made of flesh and blood, Jesus also became flesh and blood and "shared in our humanity so that by his death he might... destroy the power of death...and free those," that's us, you and me, "who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." The power of death over humans has been defeated because Jesus as a human underwent death and came out the other side - the resurrection guarantees that, and that's something to celebrate.

But as well as that, as the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus as a human being has also experienced the temptations that we have experienced, but without giving in. But because he has experienced temptation, he is able to understand when we experience temptation and to forgive us when we do give in. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: "Because he himself was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

But today, as well as being called the Feast of Christ's Presentation in the Temple, is also called Candlemas. It's called that because in the past, it was the day when all the candles to be used in the church in the coming year were brought into church to be blessed. So it was the Festival Day or Mass of the Candles.

Now, of course, we don't use candles to light our churches, but in the past candles were all that people had for light, so it was important that they functioned well, and so they were blessed. And there are still churches where the candles are blessed at this time. And you in turn will be able to have your candles blessed later in this service.

But there's another reason why we call today Candlemas and it can be found in today's reading from Luke.

We heard that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple for a special celebration – his presentation, as a baby, to the Lord.

But what lies behind this word “presentation”?

It was the custom in Jesus’ day for parents to dedicate, or present, their first born boy child to God by bringing him to the Temple. A couple of weeks ago we heard how Hannah did exactly that with her son, Samuel, but unlike Mary and Joseph she left him in the Temple. Now most parents don’t want to give their son away, so instead the Jewish law allowed parents to offer a sacrifice instead: a pair of turtle-doves or two pigeons.

And as we heard in our reading, when Mary and Joseph came to the Temple, they met the old man, Simeon, who believed God’s promise that he wouldn’t die until he had seen the Messiah, or Son of God.

As soon as Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he recognised him as the long-awaited Messiah. And as he took Jesus in his arms, he said something very interesting. He said that Jesus would be a light for revelation to the Gentiles – that’s you and me, non-Jews – and a light for glory to the people of Israel.

Jesus is being described as a light.

So that’s another reason why today is called Candlemas: because it’s the first time in the Bible that Jesus is described as being a light, and as I said earlier, in the past the only kind of artificial light that people had were candles. So it was appropriate that the church’s candles should be blessed on a day when the church was thinking about Jesus being referred to as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” For if he is a light to both Jews and Gentiles, then Jesus is indeed the Light of the World.

2021 hasn’t started particularly well, with Covid 19 even more on the rampage.

The birth of Jesus with its vision of angels flooding the fields with the light of God’s glory belongs to the old year.

But accounts of the Magi following the light of a star to worship Jesus, and his recognition by Simeon as the Light of the World belong to the New Year. And as John tells us in his gospel: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Now that is something to hang on to, something also, like Jesus’ victory over death, in which to rejoice.

But wait! There is someone else there when Jesus' parents bring him to the Temple: the old prophetess, Anna. And what did she do?

Like the old gentleman who looked into my brother's pram and then addressed my mother, Simeon only spoke to Jesus' parents, but Anna couldn't contain herself. She began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was in a dark place at the time – under the brutality of Roman occupation – just as we are in a dark place, under the brutality of Covid 19.

Anna, to coin a phrase, saw the light and shared it with others.

Are we, having seen the light, to remain silent?

Amen.

Prayer Pointers

As we celebrate Candlemas, we thank God for all those who seek the light that Christ brings into the world and for those who show that light to others by their preaching, their service and by their teaching. Thank God for that light which illuminates even the darkest corners of our lives.

Continue to pray for all those suffering in our hospitals from Covid infection, especially those who are known to us and those from our own congregations – especially for John Godfrey. Pray for their relatives unable to visit them – for all those who wait anxiously for news of their loved ones. Thank God for the skill of the medical professionals treating those who are ill – for their dedication to healing the sick whilst coping with all the stress that this brings.

Pray for Governments across the world as they make tough decisions about the pandemic and the effect that this is having on the economies of their countries. Pray that truth and wisdom may triumph and that all politicians may see serving the best needs of their country as a priority.

Pray for businesses that have been forced to close as a result of Covid restrictions, especially our local businesses in West Wickham. Hold before God all those business

proprietors and staff on furlough who are fearful of the future. Pray for all those who have, and will in the next weeks and months, lose their livelihoods – that they may not lose heart. Pray for their families, especially those with young children, and show us how we as a church community can support them.

We give thanks for all those who have died and who, like Anna and Simeon in the Temple, now see the light of Christ. May the light of Christ shine on those who are bereaved and give them comfort in their grief. Pray especially for Ann Dale and for her husband Harry and her best friend Bridget Adams; Ivy Sheen and her family - Joan, Margaret and Martin; for Kathleen Fletcher, her husband Peter and her daughter Gill and for Samuel Akadi, his fiancé Amy and their young son Isaac.

Prayer as the UK recorded over 100,000 Covid deaths

God of love, who holds us in life as in death, as we commend each one of those who have died to your eternal and tender care comfort all who grieve, hold us in our sorrow and give us that sense of hope which brings us all to resurrection life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral)